

Rep. Joseph R. Pitts
Opening Statement
Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health
Hearing on “An Examination of Federal Mental Health Parity Laws and Regulations”
September 9, 2016 (9:00 a.m.)

The Subcommittee will come to order.

The Chairman will recognize himself for an opening statement.

Today’s Health Subcommittee hearing will examine the federal mental health parity laws and regulations.

In 2008, Congress passed a bill requiring most group health plans to provide more generous coverage for treatment of mental illnesses, comparable to what is provided for physical illnesses. This Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act (MHPAEA), which followed the Mental Health Parity Act of 1996 (MHPA), requires equivalence, or parity, in coverage of mental and physical ailments.

Parity means that insurers need to treat copayments, treatment limits, and prior authorization for mental health and substance use disorder the same way they treat them for physical health care.

The MHPAEA originally applied to group health plans and group health insurance coverage, and then was amended by the Affordable Care Act (ACA) to also apply to individual health insurance coverage as well as Medicaid benchmark and benchmark-equivalent plans.

With more than 11 million Americans who suffer with severe mental illness such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and major depression, this issue is vitally important for individual patients as well as families seeking appropriate care for their loved ones.

Since there seems to be ongoing discussions on protections as envisioned in the mental health parity laws previously enacted, it is timely for this committee to consider ways to streamline the mental health parity system.

Title VIII of the Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act, authored by committee member Tim Murphy of my home state, Pennsylvania, and Eddie Bernice Johnson of Texas, offers eight provisions concerning mental health parity, such as improved compliance guidance and disclosure support.

Of particular interest to our Democrat committee members is a proposal by Rep. Joe Kennedy of Massachusetts, H.R. 4276, the Behavioral Health Coverage Transparency Act of 2015. This bill offers one of the many approaches to modifying parity requirements.

Today, we have three expert panelists who will provide testimony and answer questions on the strengths and challenges of mental health parity standards.